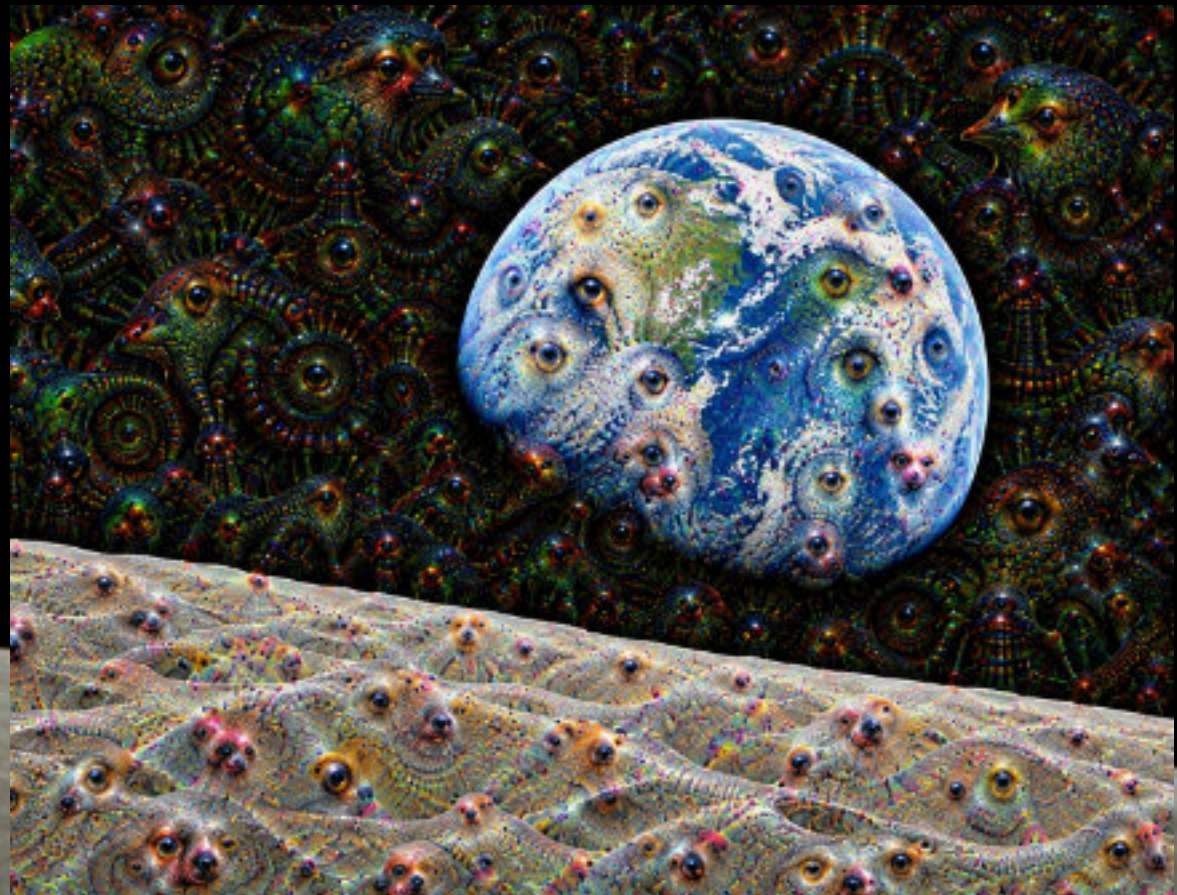


Data, Control & Hallucinations

A Critical Introduction to Artificial Intelligence

The image shows the iconic Earthrise motif transformed through Google's DeepDream process into a machine-generated hallucination. The neural network amplifies visual structures that correspond to patterns learned during training: eyes, snouts, faces, and animal-like forms emerge from craters, clouds, and image textures. Hallucination becomes literally visible—the system does not simply represent the world but projects its own learned patterns back into the image. The photographic view of the “Whole Earth” thus becomes an image of how a neural network constructs its own perception of the world.

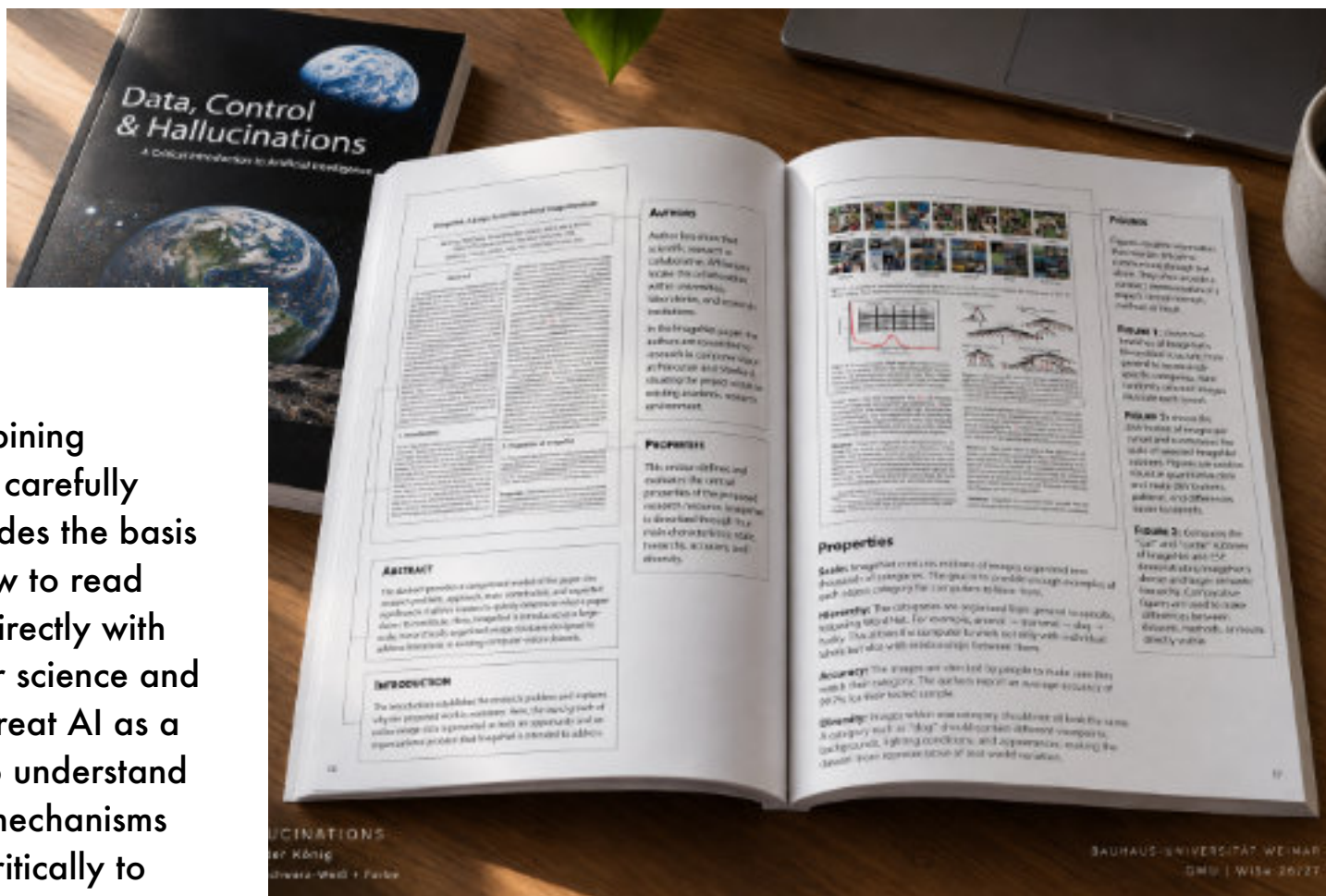
Seminar by Dr. phil. Alexander König





The cover of *Mondo 2000: A User's Guide to the New Edge*, associated with the early-1990s cyberculture that emerged from the Californian counterculture and the developing culture of Silicon Valley. It marks a historical transition from the Whole Earth Catalog's 1960s and 70s vision of personal empowerment through tools, ecology, and alternative communities toward a new technological imaginary centered on computers, networks, virtual reality, biotechnology, and hacking. The slogan "Hacking the Planet" captures this shift: technology is no longer merely a tool for understanding or living differently in the world, but increasingly a means of actively transforming and programming it. In the context of the seminar, the image situates contemporary AI within this longer history in which counterculture, computation, technological utopianism, and Silicon Valley became increasingly intertwined.

Historic Context



Technical Foundations

A **seminar handbook**, combining original introductory texts with carefully curated primary sources, provides the basis for our work. We will learn how to read scientific papers and engage directly with key publications from computer science and AI research. The aim is not to treat AI as a technological black box, but to understand its fundamental concepts and mechanisms well enough to connect them critically to their **philosophical, cultural, political, and aesthetic implications**. Theory, technical analysis and experimental practice are developed together throughout the seminar.

TechnoLogical Foundation

HEAD CHEESE WRY

Hallucination

The seminar approaches hallucination as more than an error or malfunction. Medical and neuroscientific perspectives show how hallucination can reveal the constructive and predictive mechanisms underlying ordinary perception. Walter Benjamin's experiments with altered states of consciousness extend this question into philosophy and aesthetics. Hallucination thus becomes a lens for examining the unstable boundaries between perception, prediction, imagination, and reality.

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M2: Quickly. /thought/ It's a faster feedback loop than nature?

MP: There's this meme collective intelligence floating around that I call the nodesphere, which may in fact provide that kind of mechanism. If it doesn't, we're clearly fucked, because we have to put our house in order. I don't know how long we have—I think fifty years is pretty fair—to construct the tools that allow us to actually see what's going on and to participate in the symbiosis of six billion people.

M2: But we won't use it just to keep an eye on the planet. We'll use it to keep an eye on each other. That's the downside of it because what we're also constructing is a

global panopticon. You can't take one without the other, which the government will make use of for surveillance and control.

MP: Do I worry about the government having a panopticon? No. I worry more about what happens to us if we don't have it cause then we're still in the dark. It may be more inimical to a government to have a

panopticon. We might look at it and say, "Why the hell are we trying to govern a

nation of 250 million people?" The Athenians believed it was impossible to govern a nation

of more than five thousand. We may end up with a society that's radically decentralized

cause that's how it's most effective.

M2: Which is also the submatrix of any complex system, which is made up of smaller, simpler systems.

MP: That's right. It's the way nature works.

I am not so worried about the government anymore. The tide of time has simply over-

run it. The government started being obsolete in the early nineties, and now every

day that goes by makes it painfully clear that it really doesn't do anything anymore. As

near as I can tell, the evolution of the Internet has sped up four times since

January first. It's just not possible for an institution the size of the

government to effectively cope with that rate of acceleration.

M2: What I'm curious about is, is it your goal to engulf this

epiphany to the world?

MP: Let me put it this way.

I think the Web is roughly at the same stage that

books were five hundred years ago. What seemed

revolutionary then is accepted as a basic

part of our world now. And the

Web will become a basic

part of what we do for

some

The

software

on the

CD-ROM

creates a

neural net in

the memory and

starts driving my

nervous system towards

an experience of ecstasy

POLITICAL

Doomsday narratives and utopian promises shift the debate about AI into the future. By focusing on hypothetical existential risks, they leave both the importance of AI and the authority of those who claim to control its development largely unquestioned.



PERSPECTIVE

At the same time, immediate problems—corporate monopolies, concentrated infrastructures, economic power, and control over data—recede from view. Political decisions are reframed as technical necessities, allowing private actors to bypass or weaken democratic processes.